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ABSTRACT

During the fall 1978 semester, 505 students participated in a pre-test/post-test research study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a remedial English course, COM 080, at Essex County College. The instruments used for the study were the essay portion of the New Jersey Basic Skills Placement Test, the Test of Adult Basic Education, and a course evaluation questionnaire. The results of the study indicated that 63.9% of the students successfully completed the writing portion of the course, and 10.5% scored well enough for placement in regular English courses. Students whose reading pre-test scores were in the 3rd to 7th grade equivalent range and above a 10th grade equivalent (49% of the class) made statistically significant progress. Overall, 67.7% of the students successfully completed the course with a "C" grade or better; 29.7% received an "R" (repeat) grade. The correlation between final grades and pre-test scores was low (.121): however, the correlation between post-test essay scores and final grades was somewhat higher (.320). Of the students who took the course, 382 completed the evaluation. The course was highly evaluated both by students and faculty, both groups feeling that the students' writing and reading skills had improved. The most valuable component of the course was felt to be the formal writing practice. Journal writing and free reading and browsing received low ratings. (Author/AYC)

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ESSEX COUNTY COLLEGE

Office of Institutional Research

Research Report 79 - 1

AN EVALUATION OF COM 080

August, 1979

Prepared by:
J. Scott Drakulich

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ABSTRACT

During the Fall 1978 semester, 505 students participated in a pretest/post-test research study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of COM 080. The results of the study indicated that 63.9 percent of the students successfully completed the writing portion of the course. Students whose reading pretest scores were in the 3.0-6.9 GE (grade equivalent) range and above 10+ GE (a total of 49 percent) made statistically significant progress. Overall, as indicated by the final grade, 67.7 percent of the students successfully completed the course; 29.7 percent received an "R" grade. The correlation between final grades and pretest essay scores was low (.121); however, the correlation between post-test essay scores and final grades was respectable (.320). The course was evaluated highly by students and faculty. The most valuable component of the course was formal writing practice; journal writing and free reading and browsing received a low rating.

Future research should be conducted to evaluate the placement process, follow up students who received an "R" grade, and determine why students who had a pretest reading score in the below 3.0 and 7.0-9.9 GE range failed to make significant progress.

An Evaluation of COM 080
by
J. Scott Drakulich

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the academic effectiveness of a remedial English course, COM 080. This is the lowest level remedial English course offered at Essex County College. The majority of the students placed in this course read below the seventh grade level and have a difficult time writing a paragraph.

Nationally, it is recognized that a controversy exists as to whether or not remedial education courses are effective. Some researchers, Kendrick and Thomas, conclude that remediation programs have done very little toward eradicating the academic problems of disadvantaged college students (Kendrick and Thomas, 1979, p. 171). Other authors are somewhat more supportive of remediation efforts (Roueche and Kirk, 1973 and Cross, 1976). The interested reader should examine reviews of the literature by Klingelhofer and Hollander (1973); Mulka and Sheerin (1974) and Grant (1978).

This research study is designed to evaluate the academic performance of Fall 1978 students in COM 080 as well as students' and faculty opinions of the course.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The participants in this study were 505 students who registered for and received a grade in COM 080 during the Fall 1978 semester. Of these students, 382 completed the course evaluation questionnaire in December. Also, 16 instructors of the course completed a course evaluation questionnaire.

Instrumentation

The instruments used for this study were the essay portion of the New Jersey Basic Skills Placement Test (NJBSPT), the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) levels D and M, and a course evaluation questionnaire. The essay was a 20-minute essay on an assigned topic. Each essay was scored in-house by two English professors using the holistic scoring method developed by ETS. Each essay was evaluated on a 1-4 scale. A one (1) would be assigned to a very poorly-written essay and a four (4) to an extremely well-written essay. The student's score would be a combination of the two professors' evaluation.

The TABE is an achievement test in reading. The reading comprehension test used for this study contained 42 items. The items measured the student's ability to recall specific facts presented in the passages, to understand the main ideas in the passages, and to make reasonable inferences based on information presented in the passages.

The course evaluation questionnaire, developed by COM 080 faculty, contains statements which can be responded to on a

Likert scale. The statements seek to identify which components of the course are valuable as well as to evaluate the respondent's overall opinion of the course.

Procedure

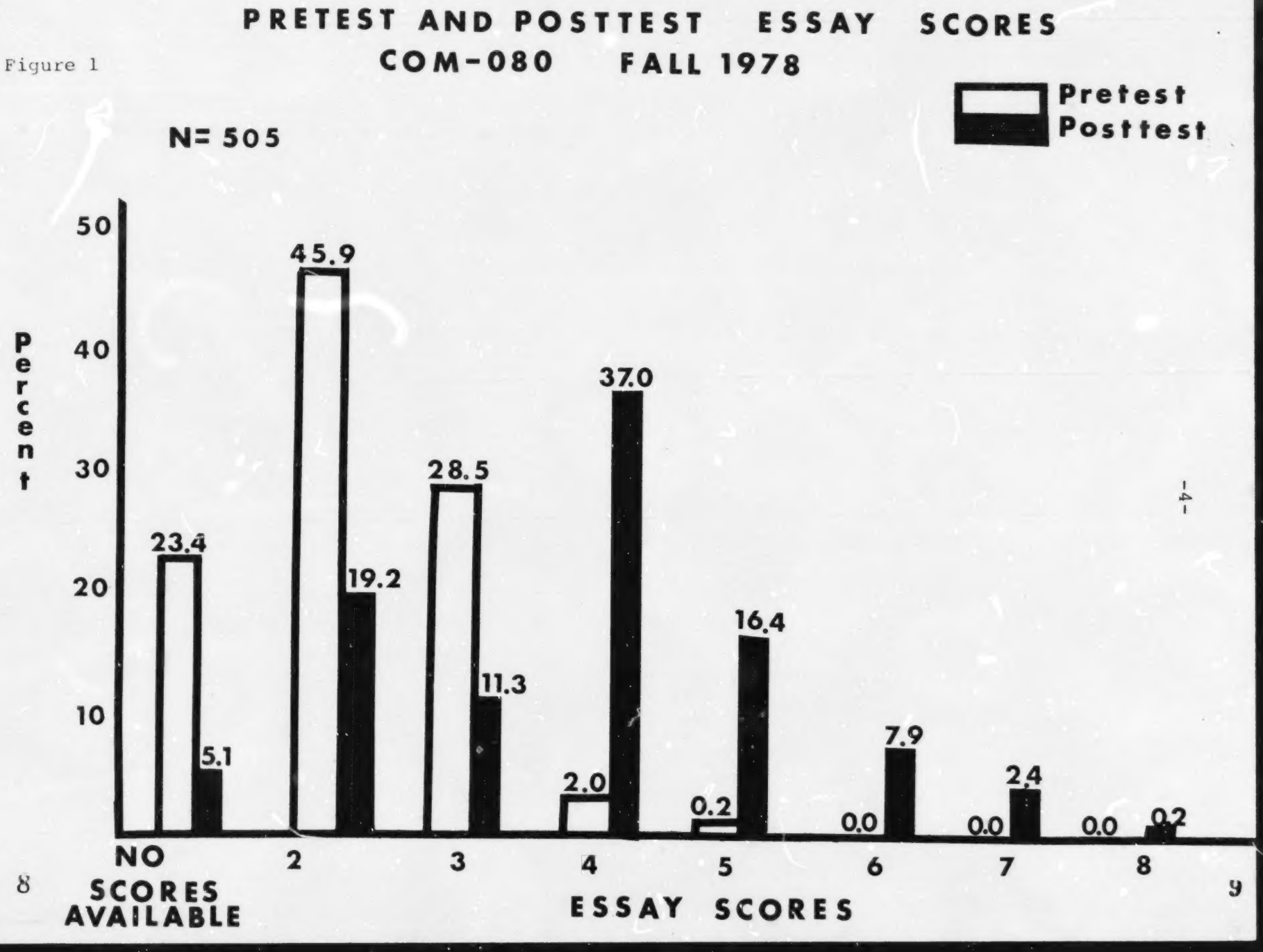
Students were placed in COM 080 on the basis of the essay score from the NJBSPT. During the first week of school, a pretest TABE was administered to the students. The post-test TABE was administered to students in December, along with the post-test essay and course evaluation forms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pretest and post-test essay results may be found on Figure 1 (page 4). The percent of students receiving an essay score ranging from 2-8 is on this figure. For example, 45.9 percent of the students had an entering essay score of 2; whereas, 19.2 percent of the students had a final essay score of 2.

The data on Figure 1 indicates that pretest essay scores for 23.4 percent of the entering students could not be located. Also, some 5.1 percent of the students' post-test essay scores could not be located (or the students did not take the post-test). When the scores are combined into score intervals, one can see that only 2.2 percent of the students scored over 3 on the pretest essay. This is what one would expect as students who score 4 or above are exempt from COM 080. This indicates that, for students for whom pretest essay scores were available, only 2.2 percent may be classified as being initially misplaced.

Figure 1


PRETEST AND POSTTEST ESSAY SCORES
COM-080 FALL 1978
N= 505
Pretest
Posttest
Percent
50
40
30
20
10
23.4
5.1
45.9
19.2
28.5
11.3
2.0
37.0
0.2
16.4
0.0
7.9
0.0
2.4
0.0
0.2
NO SCORES AVAILABLE
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
ESSAY SCORES

The fact that 63.9 percent of the students had post-test essay scores above 3 indicates that approximately two-thirds of the COM 080 class met the writing criteria to proceed to a higher level English course. In fact, 10.5 percent of the students had a post-test essay score of 6, 7, or 8 indicating that they are ready for placement in ENG 101; while 53.4 percent scored high enough to be placed in ENG 091.

The data in Figure 1 is supported by the data in Figure 2 (page 6) "Final Grade Distribution". That is, as indicated on Figure 2, 67.7 percent of the students received a final grade of C or better. It is important to note that no D grades were given and only 1.8 percent of the students received an F. However, almost one-third, 29.7 percent, received an R (repeat) grade. In other words, two-thirds of the students successfully completed COM 080 (10 percent did well enough to be placed in ENG 101); however, one-third of the students were required to repeat COM 080.

The relationship between pretest and post-test essay scores and final grades can be obtained from the correlation coefficients in Table 1. (page 7)

Figure 2

FINAL GRADE DISTRIBUTION

COM-080 FALL 1978

N=505

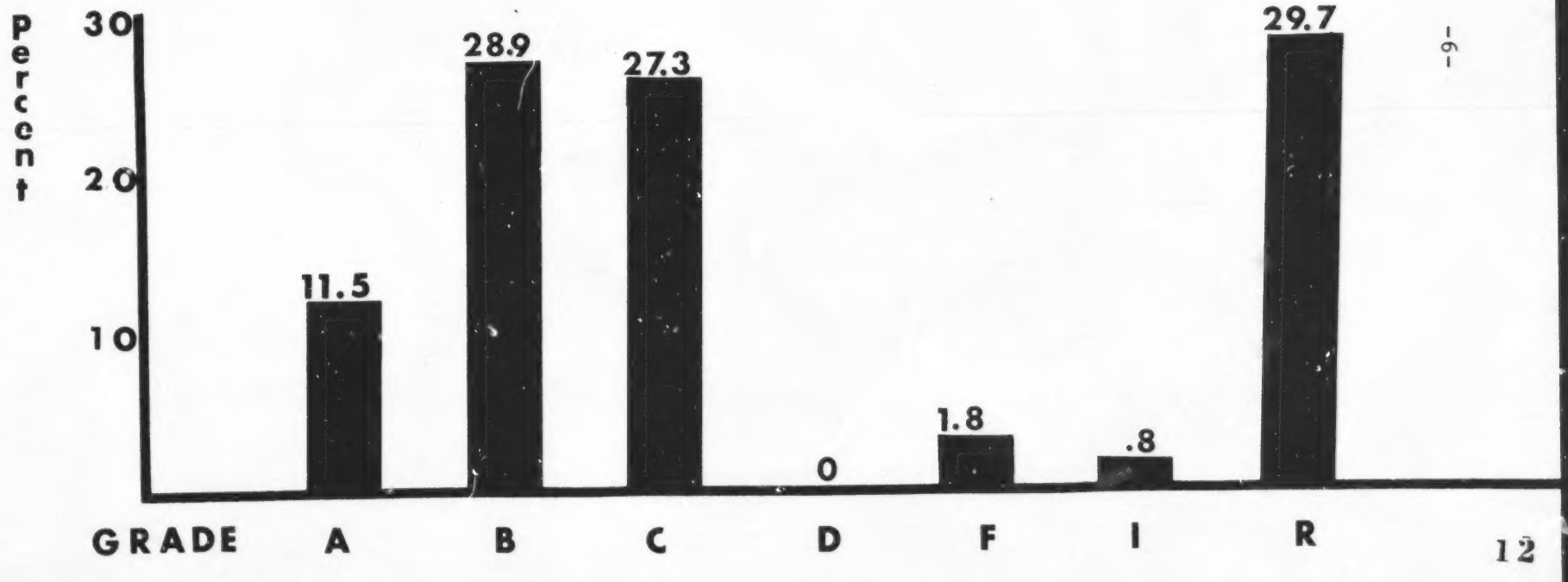


Table 1.

Pretest/Post-Test Correlation with Final Grade
COM 080 Fall 1978

Variables	Coefficient (r)	N	Statistical Significance
Pretest Essay & Final Grade	+ 0.1214	276	Significant at .022
Post-test Essay & Final Grade	+ 0.3209	330	Significant at .001

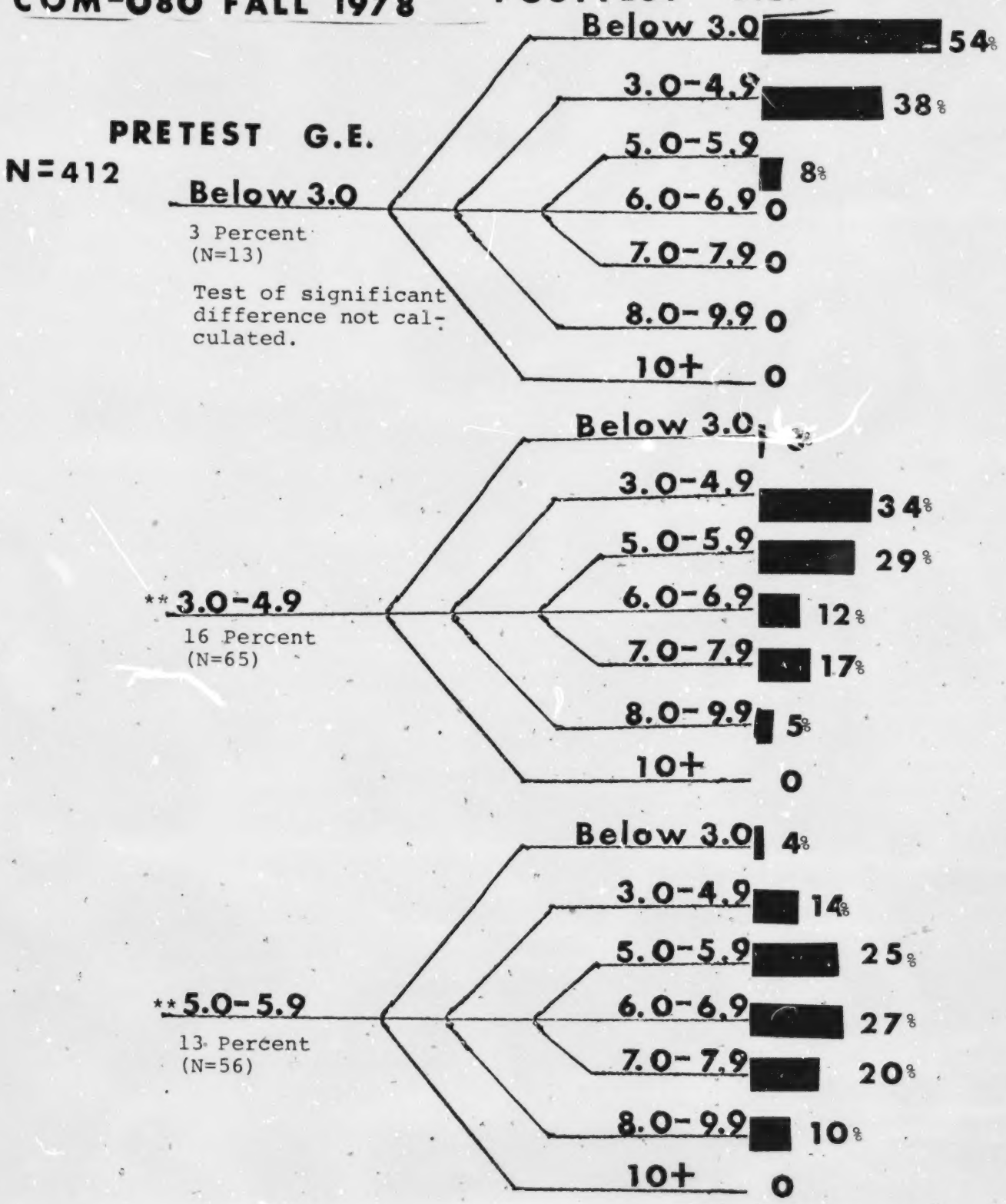
It is evident in Table 1 that the correlation between pretest essay scores and final grades for the 276 students for whom an essay score and final grade were obtained was rather low. However, the correlation between the post-test essay score and final grade was respectable. This indicates that one should not try to predict the final grade in COM 080 from the student's pretest essay score. In fact, the relatively low predictability of pretest essay scores (even when the skewed distribution is considered) may warrant a re-evaluation of our placement criteria.

Reading Scores

The data on Figure 3 (pages 8, 9 and 10) pertains to the reading portion of COM 080. This data was obtained from 412 students for whom we had pretest and post-test scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) reading comprehension test. The left side of the figure shows the percent and sample size of the students whose pretest scores were at various grade levels. The right

Figure 3

COM-080 FALL 1978



*G.E.= Grade Equivalent, Test of Adult Basic Education - Reading Comprehension
**Pretest-Posttest difference significant at .05 level.

Figure 3 Continued

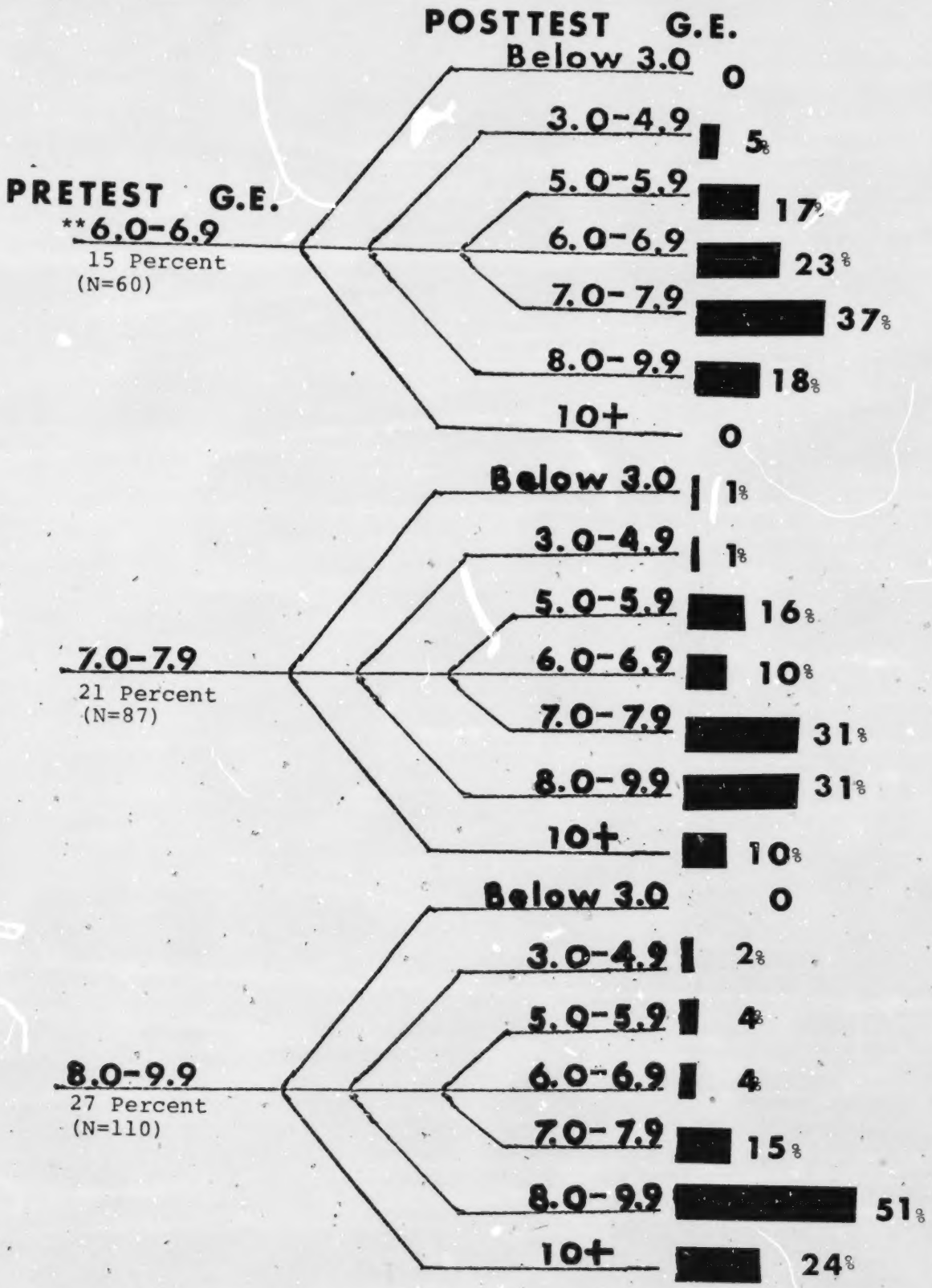
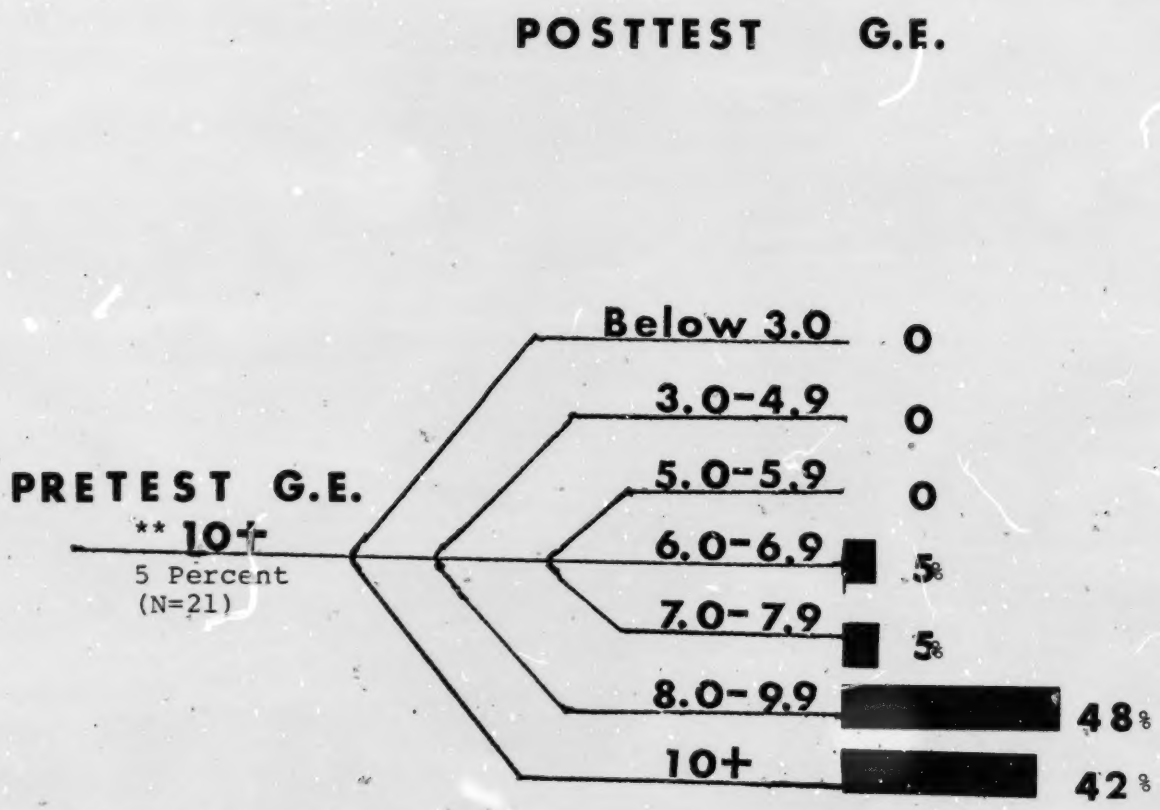


Figure 3 Continued



side indicates the distribution of post-test scores of the students at particular pretest grade equivalents (GE) levels. For example, of the 412 students, 3 percent (13 students) had pretest GE scores below 3.0. Of these 13 students, 54 percent also had post-test scores below 3.0; however, 38 percent had post-test scores in the 3.0-4.9 GE range while 8 percent had post-test scores in the 5.0-5.9 GE range. Similarly, of the 65 students (16 percent of the 412) who had pretest GE scores of 3.0-4.9, 3 percent had post-test GE scores below 3.0, or below their pretest scores; 34 percent had GE post-test scores in the same GE range of 3.0-4.9; 29 percent had post-test GE scores in the 5.0-5.9 range; etc. The double asterisk by the pretest 3.0-4.9 GE range indicates that the difference in pretest and post-test scores for this group was statistically significant at the .05 level. In other words, overall, students who entered the program scoring in the 3.0-4.9 range made significant educational progress as measured by the TABE reading comprehension test.

The group of students who showed the most improvement were those who started at the 3.0-4.9 GE range. Some 63 percent of these students improved their reading over the 5.0 GE. Approximately 57 percent of those students whose pretest scores were in the 5.0-5.9 GE range had post-test scores above the 6.0 GE. Similarly, 55 percent of those students whose pretest scores were in the 6.0-6.9 GE range had post-test scores above the 7.0 GE. Those students showing the least improvement were those who had pretest scores in the below 3.0 area and above the 8.0 GE. One possible explanation could be that the educational materials were

not appropriate for these students. Overall, statistically significant progress was made by 49 percent of the students entering COM 080 (see GE's with double asterisks).

The data in Table 2 indicates the results of the Wilcoxan Signed-Rank Test for significant difference.

Table 2.

Wilcoxan Signed-Rank Test of Significant Difference
Between Pretest/Post-Test TABE Scores
COM 080 Fall 1978

Limits of Pretest TABE Comp. Scores	Mean of Ranks of Negative Diff.	Mean of Ranks of Positive Diff.	Statistical Significance at 5% or not
366 to 441 GE 3.0-4.9	36.49	17.58	Yes
442 to 472 GE 5.0-5.9	29.82	22.44	Yes
473 to 494 GE 6.0-6.9	30.08	23.72	Yes
495 to 522 GE 7.0-7.9	39.24	44.00	No
523 to 580 GE 8.0-9.9	52.13	54.82	No
581 to Max. GE 10.0+	6.17	11.81	Yes
(Entire group)			
366 to Max.	208.55	180.96	Yes

The data in Table 2 indicates that there was a significant difference between pretest and post-test TABE Comprehension Test scores for students whose pretest score grade equivalents were 3.0-4.9, 5.0-5.9, 6.0-6.9, and 10+. In addition, when examined as a total group, students in COM 080, in general, showed significant growth.

COURSE EVALUATION

In addition to the above pretest/post-test data, essay, and grade distributions, the COM 080 faculty designed a course evaluation questionnaire to be completed by students and faculty. This questionnaire contains sixteen (16) statements designed to identify the strong and weak components of the course as well as to provide a general evaluation of the course. The results on Table 3 (page 14) pertain to the 382 students' and 16 faculty members' identification of the most helpful components. The percentage indicating a strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) response are in the first five columns. A weighted mean value is presented in the sixth column (a 4 is the highest value indicating agreement or positive response; a 1 is the lowest value indicating disagreement or a negative response). The last column is the percent not responding to the statement. The students' responses indicated that they believed that all components of the courses were helpful. There was a very little variance in their evaluation of components (mean range 2.48-2.92). The most valuable component for the student was the formal writing practice and the least valuable component was journal writing. The faculty members indicated they thought the least valuable component was free reading and browsing. For the faculty, large group writing instruction was the most helpful component followed closely by the formal writing practice. The faculty evaluated all components except free reading and browsing as helpful.

The data in Table 4 (page 15, 16) presents the students' and faculty members' responses to general evaluation statements pertaining to COM 080.

Table 3.

Evaluation of Most Helpful Components of COM 080

Student Responses (N=382) Statement	Percent SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Value	NR
1. Small group reading instruction	20.9	51.8	14.6	9.1	2.3	2.57	1.3
2. Individual learning prescription-reading	26.1	48.6	14.3	6.5	2.3	2.65	2.2
3. Free reading and browsing	19.3	51.5	15.7	7.5	3.1	2.50	2.3
4. Large group writing instruction	30.1	43.9	11.2	7.3	4.9	2.72	2.6
5. Formal writing practice	32.7	47.9	11.2	3.6	2.0	2.83	2.6
6. Journal writing	25.7	38.7	13.3	10.2	7.6	2.48	4.5
7. Individual learning prescription-English	28.0	47.1	13.3	6.5	3.4	2.69	1.7
Faculty Responses (N=16)							
1. Small group reading instruction	18.7	37.6	12.5	31.2	-	2.56	0
2. Individual learning prescription-reading	12.5	50	12.5	25	-	2.50	0
3. Free reading and browsing	12.5	37.5	37.5	-	12.5	1.75	0
4. Large group writing instruction	37.5	56.2	-	6.2	-	3.31	.1
5. Formal writing practice	62.5	25.0	12.5	-	-	3.25	0
6. Journal writing	31.2	50	12.5	6.2	-	2.87	.1
7. Individual learning prescription-English	12.5	62.5	18.7	6.2	-	2.49	.1

Table 4.

General Evaluation of COM 080

Student Responses (N=382) Statement	Percent SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Value	NR
8. My reading skill has improved as a result of COM 080	32.9	43.4	13.3	6.0	2.3	2.76	2.1
9. My writing skill has improved as a result of COM 080	37.1	45.8	9.9	3.7	1.3	2.95	2.2
10. Most of the reading content was interesting to work with	25.9	42.6	10.4	13.6	5.7	2.64	1.8
11. Most of the English content was interesting to work with	23.2	47.6	10.9	11.7	4.7	2.64	1.9
12. The content material of the course is suitable for college students	17.8	32.9	20.9	13.8	11.7	2.09	2.9
13. Small group reading sessions help me in my Career Planning course	21.2	31.4	20.4	13.3	7.3	2.12	6.4
14. I like the textbook used on small group reading instruction	18.5	44.2	13.3	15.4	6.5	2.59	2.1
15. I learned more about writing from English than from verbal lessons	15.4	33.5	24.3	16.4	8.6	2.03	1.8
16. My general reaction to COM 080 is that it is a very helpful course	48.1	32.4	8.6	3.6	4.1	3.00	3.2

Faculty Responses (page 16)

Table 4. (Contd)

General Evaluation of COM 080

Faculty Responses (N=16) Statement	Percent SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean Value	NR
8. Reading skills level improved as a result of COM 080	12.5	50	31.2	6.2	-	2.12	.1
9. Writing skills have improved as a result of COM 080	13.7	75	6.2	-	-	2.80	5.1
10. Most of the reading content material was interesting to work with	6.2	18.7	6.2	18.7	50	1.62	.2
11. Most of the English content material was interesting to work with	13.2	43.0	6.2	25	12.5	2.43	0
12. The content material of the course is suitable for college students	12.5	37.5	18.7	25	6.2	2.19	.1
13. Small group reading sessions were helpful in preparing students for CCE course	18.7	25	37.5	12.5	6.2	1.81	.1
14. Students learn more about writing from ILP than from weekly written lessons	-	6.2	12.5	31.2	50	1.31	.1
15. My general reaction to COM 080 is that it is a very helpful course	12.5	37.5	25	12.5	12.5	2.00	0

In general, the students thought that COM 080 improved their reading and writing skills. The faculty tended to agree. However, both groups (especially the faculty) thought a better job was done teaching writing than reading. The students indicated they thought the reading content material was interesting. However, the faculty rather strongly disagreed. Both seemed to agree that the English content material was interesting to work with and suitable for college students. Small group reading sessions were only somewhat helpful in assisting students in their Career Planning course. However, they did like the textbook used in the small group reading sessions. The faculty rated Individualized Learning Prescription (ILP) very low when compared with weekly writing lessons. Overall, the course was considered as being more beneficial by the students than faculty.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The most important findings of the study are:

1. that 63.9 percent of the students had post-test essay scores above 3 indicating that they satisfactorily completed the writing portion of COM 080,
2. that 10.5 percent of the students had post-test essay scores of 6, 7 or 8 indicating that they are ready for placement into ENG 101,
3. that 67.7 percent of the students received a final grade of C or better,
4. that 29.7 percent received an R (repeat) grade,
5. that grades D, F, I were essentially not given,

6. that the correlation between pretest essay scores and final grades was low (.12) indicating that our placement procedure should be re-evaluated. Also, 53 percent of the students had entering (pretest) GE scores above 7.0 indicating they had already met the reading requirements of COM 080,
7. that the correlation between post-test essay scores and final grades was respectable (.32) indicating that the student's score on his/her final essay is important in determining the student's final grade;
8. that, with respect to reading, statistically significant educational growth was indicated for students whose pretest TABE score was in the 3.0-6.9 and 10+1 grade equivalent ranges;
9. that students whose pretest reading scores were below 3.0 GE and in the 7.0-9.9 grade equivalent range did not make significant educational growth;
10. that, overall, a statistically significant difference was found between pretest/post-test scores on the TABE comprehension test;
11. that the group that showed the most improvement in reading were those whose pretest scores were in the 3.0-4.9 GE range;
12. that the groups that showed the least improvement in reading were those whose TABE pretest scores were below 3.0 GE, and between 7.0-9.9 GE,
13. In general, the students believed all components of the course were helpful, particularly formal writing practice (least helpful was journal writing);

14. that, in general, the faculty evaluated all components (particularly large group instruction and formal writing practice) as helpful with the exception of free reading and browsing;
15. that, in general, the faculty and students thought that COM 080 improved students' reading and writing skills.

Overall, unlike the conclusion of the Kendrick and Thomas study, the COM 080 course appears to have improved students' reading and writing skills. However, several research questions remain to be answered. Among these are:

1. Why were no pretest essay scores found for 32.4 percent of the students? How were they placed in COM 080?
2. Why were so many R grades given and few D's, F's or I's?
3. What happened to the 29.7 percent of the students who received R grades?
4. Why is there such a low correlation between pretest essay scores and final grades?
5. Why did the students whose pretest reading scores were in the below 3.0 and 7.0-9.9 GE range fail to make academic progress?
6. How well did the 10.5 percent of the students who had post-test essay scores of 6, 7 or 8 do in ENG 091 or ENG 101?

A few recommendations can be made from the results of this study. First, that COM 080 be continued with some modification. More specifically, journal writing and free reading and browsing

seem to be somewhat less helpful than the other components in teaching COM 080 students. The fact that the faculty rated ILP very low when compared with weekly writing lessons needs to be further investigated (perhaps better course evaluation questions need to be developed). Also, the reading materials for those whose pretest scores were below 3.0 or 7.0-9.9 GE ranges need to be evaluated. Perhaps students scoring below 3.0 should not be admitted to the College. Also, perhaps those with reading scores above 7.0 GE should take a different reading course.

Second, with regard to testing and placement, it must be determined why no pretest essay scores were available for 23.4 percent of the students. The fact that there is a low correlation between pretest essay scores and final grades, and that students scoring below 3.0 and 7.0-9.0 GE ranges do not "succeed", warrants a full investigation into the placement of students into COM 080.

Finally, a research project needs to be conducted to determine what happened to the large number of students who received an R grade.

It should be noted that COM 080 has undergone a more detailed evaluation than any other course in the College. It is hoped that in the future all compensatory education and other courses will be similarly evaluated.

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